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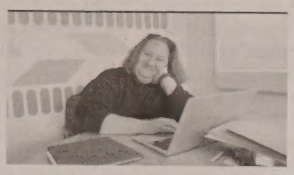
The Musket

LEXINGTON HIGH SCHOOL'S STUDENT-RUN NEWSPAPER SINCE 1969



Page 5
New Proposal for DEI Advisory

Page 6
Artist of the Issue: Sathvika Gunturu

Volume LXV Issue II — January 2023

Teacher Contract Negotiations Still in Action

Tara Pai
Taili Gao
Staff Writers

On Tuesday, Dec. 6, a rally advocating for better educator working conditions was held in the main hallway in Lexington High School. For the past four months, teachers have worked without renewed contracts, which they feel no longer fulfill their current needs post-pandemic.

Currently, many educators teach an unmanageable amount of students. They are hoping to obtain a 100-student cap per staff member in every department so they can allocate more individualized attention for each student.

"[We want] the district to acknowledge that we aren't adequately serving all kids' needs for a variety of reasons–one of which is the lack of time and another is the unsustainable workload that is constantly being topped off with another new 'thing,'" Robin Strizhak, secretary of the Lexington Education Association (LEA), said.

Additionally, the teachers want adequate compensation to attract and retain educators in the district. They also want to be included in the decision-making process of major school-wide policy changes.

"Wearing red on Tuesdays, holding mini rallies, and solidarity standouts are to remind union members what we are fighting for and to remind the School Committee and District that members are paying attention and want a resolution," Strizhak said.

The School Committee frequently meets with the LEA to discuss their concerns. Both parties hope to reach an agreement on teacher contracts in the near future, but these negotiations are delayed by complications.

"There are no drawbacks to what the LEA is requesting, but there are limitations and competing priorities. In the end, this is a math problem. We have only so many resources, but many wants and needs," Dr. Julie Hackett, Superintendent of Lexington Public Schools, said.

Using their limited resources, the School Committee is trying to meet the demands of the Teacher Union, such as higher compensation and a redistribution of the workload.

"The best way to move forward is to prioritize what matters most to all members and dedicate resources to it. If everything is important, nothing is important, and prioritization can be a challenge when there are so many proposals to consider," Hackett said.

The School Committee supports and acknowledges the organized activities of the Teacher Union.

"I believe in Unions and I was a card-carrying member myself, so I support rallies, wearing red on Tuesdays, and other organized demonstrations," Hackett said.

LHS students also contribute to teachers' efforts by attending rallies and meetings to demonstrate their support and raise awareness of the issue.

"The Teachers Union negotiations are probably the most influential decisions that are currently being made towards students and teachers right now," Swapnil Gandhi, a senior at LHS, said.

Like Gandhi, many students recognize the importance of the Teachers Union negotiations and are taking up opportunities to engage in current policy-making and programs.

Teachers wear red in support of the ongoing contract negotiations at an after-school rally.
Photo courtesy of the LEA Instagram page

However, given that the school district has been planning new programs and initiatives recently, it is difficult to speed up the process of teacher negotiations.

"The district has undertaken a breathtaking array of new initiatives over the last several years, on top of the necessary changes brought about by COVID. Individually, many of these initiatives are good ideas, but taken as a group are too much," Dr. Avon Lewis, president of the LEA, said.

However, Lewis encourages students to stay involved in their school community.

"Pay attention. Ask questions. Be informed citizens," Lewis said.

As of Jan. 23, contract negotiations have not reached a resolution. Teachers continue to hold rallies and meetings, including attending a walk-in held before school on Dec. 20 and contract negotiation sessions on Thursdays.

Behind the Scenes: A Look at LHS Custodians

Lillian Yang
Maya Bhandarkar
Staff Writers

Most students at Lexington High School spend about seven hours a day in school. On the other hand, custodians have nine-hour shifts and tend to stay in school well after students leave. While students focus on academics, they often forget the vital people behind the scenes who help maintain the school's clean environment.

Although students might be aware of the custodians' responsibilities, such as cleaning the Commons, custodians also attend to various other jobs around campus, like cleaning up spills and messes.

Custodians also make sure LHS is a safe place. This is especially important during the cold, snowy winter months when custodians may have to work overtime.

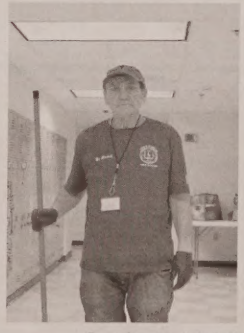
"When needed, all the custodians have to come in for snow removal," Lemay said.

Additionally, they also salt icy patches of the pavement, so students and staff don't slip.

Despite their many responsibilities, being a custodian can be rewarding. While Lemay comes in at around 2:20 p.m. and ends his shift at around 11:00 p.m., he feels that the position has many positive components.

"I think the highlight is getting areas cleaned for the students and staff which I take as a point of pride and joy. I've had the most positive interactions with the students and teachers. Everyone is friendly and respectful to others which is a great thing to see," Lemay said.

Many members of the LHS community believe that it is pivotal for students to acknowledge the people who devote their time to making LHS a clean and welcoming place, and be more observant of the messes and spills they tend to leave behind. Perhaps, the next time students pass a custodian in the hallways, it definitely wouldn't hurt to send a friendly "thank you" or "hello" as a token of appreciation.



Custodian Mr. Mitchell working hard
Photo by Daniel Kim

Swiping Left on My High School Job

Alexis Chen
Columns Editor

Finding a job is exactly like dating. You want to find a place that will make you happy, with the most benefits and least worries. Once a business matches with you, those "what if?" questions that are present during your first training shift are similar to the ones that you feel on a first date. What if I do something wrong? What if they don't like me?

Two summers ago, I worked as an ice cream scooper at a local shop in Lexington Center. I can remember the excitement I felt when I was hired. Every shift I worked, I had pride in serving my community. I wasn't just working to earn money. I made friends as I interacted with strangers.

People say that relationships develop either into love or lost feelings after three months of dating. The end of the honeymoon phase is really the make-or-break moment for work as well. For me, my work relationship developed into the latter.

At the start of junior year, I was one of the only remaining upperclassmen at my workplace. Everyone else either graduated, or quit to prioritize other parts of their life. As a result, I started taking on more responsibility, one of which was training new hires. Although I felt pressure, work didn't start feeling like a burden until management changed completely. New rules were implemented, and along with them, an even greater responsibility.

Mandatory work shifts took up a large chunk of my time. I started taking time out of my sleep schedule to finish homework. Getting back home at 9 p.m. made me frustrated. I could've spent four hours doing something more productive than being yelled at by Karens. All the red flags of my job started revealing themselves.

Yet, I wanted to see if anything else was keeping me there. As a final effort, I decided to ask for a raise, since I felt I wasn't being adequately paid. I didn't have much hope to begin with, but when it was decided that I wouldn't receive a raise regardless of all my extra work, I decided I was out.

From the student perspective, balancing work, academic, and social life is a tough challenge. However, after setting goals and reevaluating my priorities, I realized that maintaining a balance is possible. There's always going to be challenges. What matters is how you grow from them. Having a job is amazing. Making new friends and gaining independence are some of the best feelings in the world. However, when the balance is lost, things can change.

Things might not always work out. You won't be compatible with everyone, and it's the same with the work experience. It's always going to be a game of trial and error. If you don't feel like you are receiving the treatment you deserve, learn to self-advocate. If you still aren't valued, learn to walk away. Don't prioritize what's on your schedule. Instead, learn to schedule your priorities.

College Bored

Anika Basu
Joanna Liu
Columns Editor

Disclaimer: This column is satire.

Congratulations! After much deliberation, it is with great pleasure that we offer you admission into [Insert T20 School Here]. Among the over 20,000 applications we read, your distinguished record of academic excellence has stood out, and you will be joining a vibrant community of faculty and staff.

This is quite an accomplishment, and your acceptance will, without a doubt, open you up to countless opportunities destined to change your life for the better. Don't believe me? Well, I give you the unique opportunity to preview your life two weeks, two months, two years, and twenty years into the future.

Two Weeks

You're literally, like, the coolest person in the world. That Chegg membership sure was worth it. Everyone in school looks up to you— literally. They're printing posters of you to hang up in Cary Library so children can look at you while reading "Goodnight Moon." Parents bring kids to Kumon, RSM, or Chyten in droves, hoping that their kid can save a third world country from imminent collapse, figure out a way for ChatGPT to stop storing all your data, or do whatever it is you did to get accepted into your Ivy League dream school.

Two Months

Now that you've been accepted, what else do you need to do? While lowly underclassmen are stressing over how to pass their biology test, you already know that you've achieved everything that they could ever hope for. Just sit back, relax, and quit every club you've joined.

What's a little senioritis when you're set for life?

Two Years

Admittedly, college isn't as glamorous as the movies made it out to be. Instead of falling in love with Harry Styles knock-offs like Hardin from After, you're doing homework, writing papers, and studying for tests. Who would guess that attending an "academically rigorous institution" is harder than just changing your Instagram bio? It's like high school all over again and the only difference is that your notebooks and water bottles have your college logo stamped all over them. You're not just some average student that studies in an overpriced coffee shop.

Still, your life is better than your friends who go to (gag) public schools. Although you originally applied to major in Women's Studies, you've decided to switch gears, and you find it hard to choose between your saintly career as an investment banker, consultant, or whatever lucrative finance job everyone else has. Although you're hoping for a return offer from a boutique firm, in the meantime, you build a career as a YouTuber and accumulated almost nine thousand subscribers. On your channel, you spend time making videos about your unique and exciting life, personality, and talents. Your most popular videos include "MY COLLEGE ACCEPTANCE RESULTS!!! (ft. Ivies, MIT, Stanford, etc.)" and "How I was Accepted to My Dream School— my extracurriculars, stats, and essays."

Twenty Years

You're not unemployed— you're writing a book! Or at least, that's what you tell people when they ask what you, a self-published author, do for a living. This certainly sounds better than admitting that an Ivy League admit like yourself could be without a job, especially when your novel is guaranteed to have over four reviews on Amazon! Alumni networking, anyone?

But of course, there's one career you haven't thought of that is certainly up to par with your qualifications: college counseling. There, you spend the rest of your days charging people exorbitant prices for adding an extra comma and giving motivational speeches into crowds of demanding parents and their underachieving children. It's really no different than Barack Obama addressing the nation— he's a Columbia and Harvard alumnus, after all.

Congratulations again on your acceptance into our college. We're looking forward to seeing all the amazing feats you will accomplish in the years to come.

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Does LHS emphasize STEM over Humanities?

■ Arkesh Kumar
Alex Lau
Staff Writers

At Lexington High School, students are offered a wide range of courses to select from. Most classes fall under the category of either science, technology, engineering, mathematics (STEM) or humanities. However, students across LHS seem to believe that there's an imbalance between the emphasis on STEM and humanities classes.

Many feel that the Lexington community seems to value STEM over humanities classes due to the diversity of advanced-level STEM courses that are offered in comparison to the limited advanced-level courses for humanities.

"I think the selection of STEM courses is probably a bit more diverse," Sishir Mahavadi, a junior, said.

However, the extracurricular activities offered at LHS for both STEM and humanities balance each other out in terms of what's available.

"I feel like there's a pretty even split. There are pretty notable activities on both sides, debate for humanities, Science Olympiad for STEM, for example," Janet Liu, a junior, said.

There can be more than enough extracurricular opportunities for both sides, but without the proper offering of classes, it would not allow students to completely explore what they wish to pursue throughout their lives.

LHS offers significantly more advanced-level STEM classes which allows students to explore multiple opportunities, and see what's best for them. But in terms of humanities, with the limitations available, students aren't able to completely explore the future opportunities that the humanities field offers. That's why it's imperative that more advanced-level courses are offered in humanities.

"The fact there are no AP English classes offered at LHS is ridiculous and neglects English-focused students completely, and the Honors for All curriculum that LHS is implementing only further fails to bridge this gap," Liu said.

There are two potential reasons why this occurs. First, it's probable the Lexington community has created a belief that STEM-oriented fields could lead them toward a better future.

Second, there could be the stereotypes around STEM oriented occupations which parents could influence their kids around. Students in general probably value STEM more than humanities because STEM classes are generally quite popular at LHS.

"I can imagine a lot of people, including many of my friends, feeling pressured to do STEM activities due to their competitiveness and popularity at LHS," Mahavadi said.

It's important that every single student understands how to make the best use of the opportunities given to them. Offering more advanced level opportunities for humanities will truly allow students to grow and decide how their futures might look like.

Virtual Parent Teacher Conferences

■ Maddie Chang
Emily Wu
Staff Writers

Parent-teacher conferences are important to keeping parents informed about their child's high school experience, but do the benefits still stand when they are held virtually?

Despite the discontinuing virtual learning, Lexington High School has continued to host parent-teacher conferences virtually, which started during the pandemic. Virtual conferences are more accessible for families and educators, allowing students to take a more active role in their academics.

Generally, parent-teacher conferences are effective because they connect parents with their child's teacher, which in turn, allows for better student-teacher relationships. Additionally, conferences are used as a tool to improve a student's performance.

"Typically, if a student needs performance intervention, I would say 75% of the time there is improvement [after parent-teacher conferences]," Steven Wilkins, a science teacher, said.

Another factor that might contribute to this improvement is opening up virtual conferences for students to attend. This allowed students to add to the conversation with their teachers, rather than only having parents being aware of their academic performance.

"[Regardless of in-person or virtual], I rarely see improvement in a students' performance unless the student attends the conference," Laura Sheppard-Brick, a math teacher, said.

While it has been made clear that conferences with students attending tend to be more effective, many teachers also believe that virtual meetings with just parents are better because they are more convenient for both parties.

"I think the biggest difference is it's easier for parents to hop on a virtual conference than come to the school. Many of the parents/guardians I met with usually are videoing in from their work. Pre-pandemic they would either have to take the whole day off or try to schedule later conferences, which were more popular in order to avoid having to miss work," Cyndie Larkin, a history teacher, said.

Additionally, many teachers have voiced the constant struggle for parents to make it to in-person conferences on time.

"I think [virtual meetings] allow us to make sure that the conference [starts and ends at the correct time]. Because it's just more seamless to kind of make that transition than conferences that are happening in person and parents have to run around the building," Melissa Soule, an English teacher, said.

Parent-teacher conferences should prioritize improving a student's performance in class, which can be achieved when both parents and students attend the conference. Through conferences, parents can be more informed on their child's academic performance and ways in which the parent can assist the student.

While conferences are beneficial, virtual conferences, in particular, present a time-efficient, effective, and convenient method for teachers to communicate and help students succeed at LHS.

Lexington Elementary Schools: Start Times

■ Nolan An
Katie Lin
Staff Writers

For years, there has been an ongoing debate about the start and end times for Lexington Public Schools. Since the 2020-2021 school year, the start times for middle, high, and elementary schools have been changed to 8:00 a.m., 8:30 a.m., and 9:00 a.m., respectively. The change was intended to allow high school students to sleep more. However, the district should consider changing the current elementary school start time, as it has caused many issues for elementary school families and teachers alike.

Since pre-pandemic traffic levels have reappeared, students from the Metropolitan Council for Educational Opportunity (METCO) program have been particularly impacted by these later start times. The program, which allows children living in Boston to attend school in Lexington, requires students to take long bus rides between these two locations.

"The timing of when school starts right now also happens to be when the traffic is the worst, getting from Boston to Lexington. These kids are on a bus for longer than I think they should be, and longer than they were beforehand," Kallie Carnevale, a fifth-grade teacher at Bridge Elementary School, said.

The current school starting time also makes elementary teachers' lives more difficult.

"Some of my students have to be dismissed early in order to make it to extracurricular activities. I, as well as other parent teachers, have to pay for after school care for our children because we can't be there to pick up our kids after school," Cate Campbell, a fourth-grade teacher at Bridge Elementary School, said.

Students also have a harder time learning and focusing later in the day, a problem only exacerbated by the late start times.

As a possible solution to these issues, the school committee has proposed that elementary schools change their start times to be more than an hour earlier, starting at 7:40 a.m. By creating earlier start and end times, this proposal would allow students more time for extracurriculars and teachers to have more time with their own kids.

However, there are downsides to this change. Not only would this new start time require lifestyle changes for families, but it would also create a new problem for METCO students. Even with the current elementary start time, 9:00 a.m., they still wake up extremely early.

"Some of these kids, already, for this 8:45 start time, are still waking up at 6:00 in the morning, even earlier… to get onto the bus and pick up all of their classmates. I can't imagine what time they would have to wake up to make it for an earlier start time," Campbell said.

The proposal for an earlier start time also creates problems for teachers, especially those who are parents. The debate has ended up pushing teachers even to consider leaving their jobs so they can prioritize their families.

"I have plenty of friends in this building who said, 'If you go to that earlier time, I have to find a new job. There's no way I can do that without dropping off my kids at daycare. I can't do that any earlier than I already do,'" Campbell said.

According to the district, the "ideal" start time for elementary schools of 8:00 a.m. cannot be implemented without affecting the middle and high school schedules. Buying more buses so all grade levels can have the same start and end times would be costly, and making start times earlier for high school and middle school would undo the later start times implemented for high school.

However, this doesn't mean the school committee cannot settle on a different start time, even if it is later than 7:40, which would solve many of the problems the start and end times have caused.

Debunking Myths about Teachers

■ Nikki Prasad
Sophia Zhang
Staff Writers

In the midst of chaotic school days, students often overlook the personal lives of teachers at Lexington High School. When the bell rings at 3:10 p.m., many may think teachers are done for the day, but that is not the case.

Besides classes, teachers participate in faculty meetings, department meetings, and Professional Learning Communities (PLCs). These meetings aim to improve curriculum and inclusivity, allow teachers to access student work, and enable teacher collaboration.

However, teachers struggle to find a balance between their life as a teacher and their home life, due to the nature of their job and their large workload.

"I think sometimes people forget that teachers are humans, that we have emotions and we have cars that need oil changes, we have dogs that need to be taken care of and fed, we have doctors appointments and physical therapy. A lot of us need to have second jobs to live in the communities we want to live in, so when people forget about that and forget that we are humans," Beckie Bray Rankin, a French teacher, said.

Rankin not only creates lessons for her five classes (usually six hours per lesson), but is also a president and leader of several boards, such as the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages and Northeast Conference on the Teaching of Foreign Languages, to name a few. As a result, she is not only dedicating time to making an impact in her own classroom, but also at the national level. This is especially difficult given teacher shortages at LHS.

"We're missing 20% of our staff across the board and there's people trying to do it but they have no support. And so I'm helping these people who are working on having lateral certification. There's so many issues and I can't tackle them all, but I'm making a value and effort," Rankin said.

These behind-the-scenes challenges that teachers face are prevalent across all grades and subjects. For instance, the worksheets, tests, and class notes that seem so readily available to students take teachers hours to create.

"It can take four hours for me to write a four page test and if I'm writing two versions of the test and a makeup assessment, the writing process can easily exceed ten hours," Andre Verner, a math teacher, said.

In addition to underestimating the time and effort required to prepare for class, students might also make other assumptions about teachers' lives regarding their skill level.

"The myth I hear the most is 'if you can't do, teach.' We are all professionals in our field in some way. That is a part of how we were trained to teach: to know the content, and know how to teach it to people," Jessica Khamarji, an art teacher, said.

Another aspect that's largely unknown to the student body is the work teachers need to do if they are absent.

"If you wake up in the morning and you realize that you're sick, you have to log in to the website, say why [you are absent], create lesson plans, and fill out the other forms. But then you don't know if students are in the IDLC or in the classroom, so we have to make plans that could go in either direction," Rankin said.

Despite the difficulties that educators frequently encounter, they are still enthusiastic about teaching. Oftentimes, teachers will even spend money coming up with meaningful lessons that will help students improve.

"I feel like everything I experience out in the world can be turned into a lesson plan. For instance, I was in therapy the other day, and we started with a mindful moment. I was immediately thinking about how I should have some mindful moments for my students too," Khamarji said.

Teachers are dedicated to spreading their own knowledge to help students flourish. The commitment and time needed to create challenging material and a healthy learning environment is a gift educators are happy to give.

"I really do it for the conversations we can have. When someone realizes that inclusive writing is just an important way of doing things, it's like 'yes, you're going to be a better human in the world and be more inclusive of other people," Rankin said.

Lexington High School Qualifies for WGBH High School Show

■ William Tang
Ryan Asarpour
Staff Writers

On Nov. 6, the Lexington High School Quiz Show team qualified for the High School Quiz Show, a tournament organized by the WGBH media station. In the competition, schools compete for the Massachusetts State Championship. The team has four starters: seniors Rory Fox and Evan Bouwens and sophomores Atreya Mallanna and Owen Jiang. Joshua Olivier-Mason, an English teacher, coaches them.

"[The Quiz Show] is a bracket-style competition with single-elimination and comprises categories like science, math, literature, current events, sports, and pop culture. Lexington has had a long history of success in the tournament, having qualified for the most consecutive years," Olivier-Mason said.

To qualify, the team participated in Super Sunday, an event where teams from more than 100 Massachusetts schools took a 45-minute test. Lexington placed second, and since then, they have been preparing for the State Championship.

"The most important part of our preparation is the teamwork phase. No single student or person could ever memorize all of the trivia in the world, so it's important to work with your team when you can confer," Jiang said.

In addition to individual preparation for their subjects, the team is also practicing their buzzing skills with pens.

"We also just signed up for buzzer practice at the studio in January. We will spend an hour practicing with the buzzer which sounds a little silly but the buzzer makes a big difference. A lot of the students on both teams typically know the majority of the answers and it is often just, in my experience, a timing thing," Olivier-Mason said.

Participants on the team have prior experiences with buzzer-style competitions ranging from the National Geographic Geography Bee to Science Bowl, and will apply acquired knowledge to the Quiz Show.

"Both me and Atreya competed against each other in the Geography Bee several years ago. In middle school, I did science bowl and I currently do the National Ocean Science Bowl," Bouwens said.

While some team members do have experience using buzzers in competitions, it is especially important for them to practice those skills. This is because the Quiz Show used an online interface for the past couple years due to COVID.

"WGBH did a good job managing to keep the competition going through a virtual tournament, but the fun of going into the studio was gone," Olivier-Mason said. "The change in the nature of the competition affected Lexington's performance in the tournament."

As the Quiz Show returns to the studio for the first time since 2020, the team will have to stay calm and work well under pressure to succeed.

"During the competition, it is important not to get caught in the moment. It is one of the hard things to prepare for. When we have made it out of the first round, the team has more confidence," Olivier-Mason said.

The team's first matchup against Hingham High School will air on March 11, and if victorious in the two subsequent competitions, the team will advance to the State Championship.

LHSchat: Addressing Injustices

■ Ella Li
Angela Shi
Staff Writers

Lexington High School's latest initiative in tackling the injustices in current events is a student-led organization, LHSchat. The organization was originally based off of a larger organization in Lexington: LexChat.

"I attended [LexChat] as a participant, and the teachers and students involved in that initial organization recognized the need to bring those conversations to the high school. So that fall, we founded LHSchat for community conversations about race and racism in our community," Sophie Blum, an LHS English teacher, faculty advisor, and continuous participant, said.

Despite being centered around racism, LHSchat has been incorporating other relevant issues as well. LHSchat has partnered with many other student organizations to hold more specific conversations during their monthly events.

"We've partnered with the GSA, the Gender and Sexuality Alliance, to host a conversation about intersectionality between race, gender, and sexuality," Blum said. "We've also partnered with other LHS student organizations such as the Asian Student Union to organize conversations about anti-Asian bias and the model minority myth."

These partnerships allow for meaningful conversations that are necessary to grow awareness of issues within the student body. In the past, LHSchat has successfully held conversations about Black History Month, racism in higher education, and the lack of addressing racism within schools. These sorts of topics are essential for all to understand, regardless of one's background.

"Part of LHSchat is that we encourage folks to leave their roles outside of the conversation," Blum said. "We invite teachers to come in to use their first names, because we all are equal members of this community and have a shared responsibility in understanding each other and also how racism impacts our lives."

In this way, LHSchat provides an opportunity for teachers and students to openly share their opinions when discussing the impact at LHS. Student and staff support for LHSchat conversations only reinforces its importance.

"The fact that hundreds of LHS staff and students turned out for those conversations testifies to the appetite for those conversations at LHS," Blum said.

LHS Launches African American History Elective This Year

Jolene Cai
Annie Wang
Staff Writers

This year, Lexington High School is offering a new African American history course where students explore African history through various discussions.

Though it's a new offering, the concept of a course centered around African American history has been around for years. Recently, such courses have been adopted at schools around the country, including LHS. The African American History course resulted from a joint effort of LHS students advocating for ethnic studies over the course of a few years.

"Students have also played a key part in helping shape the curriculum.," Jay Quarantello, an LHS teacher of the African American History course, said.

This curriculum is composed of mainly three sections—a theoretical framework about race, big ideas in each period of African American history, and stories of resistance against slavery—all of which serve to apply lessons from the past to the present and future. To better digest this information, students also participate in class debates and discussions.

"What's going well is that we've had a lot of conversations and discussions and arguments about African American history and our conception of race and racism," Quarantello said.

The African American History Course is distinct from other history classes in many ways. For instance, it focuses less on the chronological order of history and more on important events. Rather than solely concentrating on specific pieces of African history, this course sheds light on a variety of African experiences in America. As a result, it highlights new perspectives and provides a holistic view of African American history.

"I think that it helps raise awareness to African American history and it helps students learn more than just slavery and segregation," Nasir Govan, an LHS freshman taking the course, said.

Because the course is offered to all LHS students, people of different cultural backgrounds can discuss race and racial issues together. Students are offered opportunities to explore African American history beyond the classroom; guest speakers have been invited, and classes have gone on field trips to learn the roots of African American history.

The course's focus on communication and learning from diverse perspectives helps strengthen the classroom community. Students are encouraged to be open and accepting of different opinions. As a result, students agreed that the experience allowed them to speak more honestly and learn from others' ideas.

"I was exposed to Black students' perspectives on race for the first time which were eye-opening and gave me a new viewpoint to look at our country. Our class opened up many uncomfortable, but important conversations about how certain students have privilege over others, and how despite LHS's commitment to diversity, racial self-segregation and connotations persist in our student body," Benjamin Shair, an LHS senior taking the course, said.

New Proposal for DEI Advisory

Anagha Chakravarti
Avni Rathi
Staff Writers

Lexington High School art teacher Monique Harris-Schramme has been working to implement a district-wide Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) curriculum during school advisory blocks. DEI programs have been a recent priority for LHS because of its emphasis on improving the student environment.

Recently, students and teachers alike have been inspired to take action after reading reports about racial and geographic disparities in the school community. Working with a committee of teachers, counselors, and other support staff across the district, Harris-Schramme outlined the priorities and goals of the DEI curriculum to better cater to the needs of the student body.

"One of the things that we agreed on was the social justice standards, which are identity, justice, diversity, and action in that kind of sequence. So those were the ones that really kind of spoke to us as a committee," Harris-Schramme said.

Harris-Schramme believes that having DEI-focused advisory blocks will create an open environment and facilitate student-led discussions.

"I would love to see advisory be a place where people can have conversations that lead to personal growth, and I think self reflection," Harris-Schramme said. "It'd be amazing if advisory would also be a place where there could be themes and you can group by affinity for that."

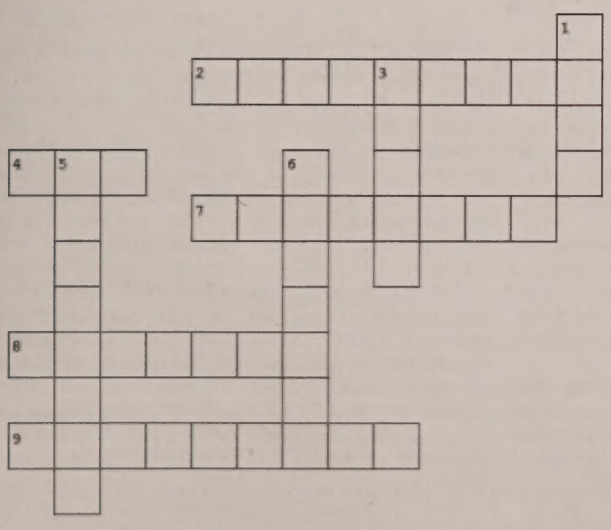
Already, student groups facilitated by Johnny Cole, Director of Equity & Student Support at Lexington Public Schools, are safe spaces to discuss DEI-related issues. However, given the small size of the student groups he leads, Harris-Schramme hopes to extend these conversations to a larger but still close-knit advisory group setting.

So far, this year's advisory sessions have mainly consisted of slideshows and safety drills, or otherwise have been studies. Consequently, students like Aditi Nagaraja, a sophomore, are supportive of new ways to utilize advisory blocks, including Harris-Schramme's new DEI curriculum proposal.

"I feel like our advisory group we spend all four years with, and the more we get to know each other and be more, the more we get to know each other's narratives and each other's perspectives of the world, the easier it would be to see other people's perspectives when we go off to college," Nagaraja said.

Like others, Nagaraja would like to see students gain an understanding of "genuine diversity" through interactive activities and engaging discussions—which are the main goals of the DEI program. Regardless, both teachers and students believe that implementing a DEI curriculum during advisory blocks will increase understanding of diverse identities and promote inclusion within the school community.

Fun Page Crossword



Across

2. The Hastings STEM Club created a murder mystery lesson using what type of ink?
4. The LHS spring musical of The Addams Family will open in early ___.
7. Teachers have noticed that parent-teacher conferences are more effective when _____ attend, as well as parents.
8. Before coming to Lexington in 2009, Naomi Martin, LHS's athletic director, worked in what town with a population of only around 600 students?
9. To build a robot, the LHS robotics team first builds a _____ of the robotic hardware to test their ideas and choose what mechanisms they plan to use.

Down

1. The African American history elective was launched this ___ as a joint effort between teachers and students.
3. To qualify for the High School Quiz Show State Championship, the LHS Quiz Show team participated in the ____ Sunday competition.
5. Teachers are working to implement a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) curriculum during what period?
6. To raise awareness about the lack of active contracts for teachers, students and teachers have been wearing red on what day of the week?

The Addams Family Makes an Appearance at Lexington

Allison Liu
Angela Tang
Staff Writers

This year, Lexington High School's spring musical is The Addams Family, a popular show depicting the lives of a gothic, aristocratic, and satirized version of the 20th-century American family.

Musical director Carly Kalivas and tech director Carlton Ward are already preparing for the show, which will open in early May. They chose this show because it presents many production possibilities. The musical will feature elements such as opening doors, an ensemble representing the Addams family ancestors, and other components that distinguish it from a typical show.

"As the person building [the set], this was the [musical] I was pushing for because I think it's going to be a lot of fun to make this sort of gothic-style architecture and graveyard," Ward said.

Apart from the set, the show also has important underlying themes.

"I believe this musical is trying to remind us all that no matter who you are, the bonds of family and friendship remain strong with honesty and open communication," Kalivas said.

The process of creating a musical is complex. From start to finish, it usually takes three months to produce. Within that time, actors, the stage crew, and the pit orchestra regularly schedule meetings to build or rehearse. However, before this can occur, the directors must first choose students for each group.

The first round of auditions for actors begins on Feb. 6th. Auditionees will sing a chosen song and display their performance ability by learning some choreography.

"We always recommend choosing a song [you] feel comfortable and confident with that shows off [your] vocal range and personality... We want to get to know you in your audition, not just what you think we want to hear for a specific character in the show," Kalivas said.

In addition to performers, the musical's directors recruit students to be a part of the tech crew. They build the sets, control the lights, manage the microphones, and take part in tasks to ensure the show runs smoothly. The process of designing the set is an evolving production process.

"After thoroughly reading the script and having a few production meetings with the production faculty... the technical director and costume designer draft up concepts for necessary props and costumes, which will then be refined and constructed by the student stage crew," Kalivas said.

Overall, producing the musical requires everyone to collaborate, creating an environment where people can get to know and trust each other. Additionally, it allows individuals to express themselves and explore their own talents.

"My favorite part of any musical is getting the chance to work with so many brilliant, passionate students and colleagues. Watching each person with their own role, talents, and enthusiasm help build the world of the show and breathe life into the story is such an incredible experience," Kalivas said. "There is nothing else like it in the world."

Artist of the Issue: Sathvika Gunturu

Seiya Saneyoshi
Disha Sankholkar
Staff Writers

Sathvika Gunturu, a Lexington High School senior, has developed her creative expression through various mediums and art forms. Her visual artwork has been featured multiple times in the LHS Art & Literary Magazine, Folio.

Gunturu's art journey began at a young age, starting with doodling on the papers she got from school. She briefly took art classes with a family friend but decided to stop so she could independently explore different mediums. Throughout the years, she has developed her own creative process.

"I like to say that my creativity can't exist without logic. If I don't understand how something works, I can't create something. I can't reimagine it in my own head," Gunturu said.

During a recent trip to Acadia National Park, Gunturu recalled a moment when she felt at ease in her creative state.

"I don't necessarily need a set direction... If I get something on paper, I can just let my mind wander. Eventually, it'll start molding it into something that I want to say," Gunturu said.

For her Advanced Placement Art class, she recently created a work titled "Love Heals All Wounds," which depicts a human heart inside a body cavity.

"The fabric is torn open to reveal the heart, representing how strong emotions can often make people feel as if they are exposed and vulnerable–much like an open wound," Gunturu said.

In addition to her love of creating visual art, Gunturu also expresses herself through the performing arts. She is a Bharatanatyam dancer, which is an Indian classical form of dance that originated in Southern India. Following a visit to India, where she learned the basics, Gunturu began formally training in Bharatanatyam in second grade.

"I felt like it could let me get my energy out, while also giving me a deeper understanding of my culture and connecting me more to India, because since third grade or so I haven't been back at all," Gunturu said.

Sathvika Gunturu stands with her art piece, "Love Heals Our Wounds"

Photo by Vikram Anantha

Gunturu performed her Arangetram, the debut performance, in July 2021 but continues to take Bharatanatyam classes.

Through her artwork and dance, Gunturu hopes to continue sharing parts of her identity and culture with others.

"I wanted to share how much... my culture meant to me, I wanted other people to see that," Gunturu said.

Painting a Picture: LHS Mural Crew

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Zahra Karim
Staff Writers

Every day, thousands of students pass by vivid landscapes of color on walls and buildings of Lexington High School. The student-led Mural Club carefully plans and creates each piece of art.

Although the murals communicate various themes and messages, their overarching purpose is to spread positivity and create a light atmosphere at school.

"The point of the club is for a lot of students to have fun with art and to paint, and to create a change in something you see down the halls every single day," Shreya Kanaujia, a junior and vice president of the club, said.

Being a part of the mural crew provides a variety of benefits, including allowing its members to improve their artistic, communication, and collaboration skills.

"The team isn't filled with people that are necessarily well-versed in painting and such, so it's definitely the journey of the mural that kinda gets us there, and less so of exactly what the outcome is," Atreyi Basu, a junior and president of the club, said. "It's just the collaboration and the working together with a group of people that makes it as beautiful as it is."

The murals around the school have sometimes worked towards different goals. Murals painted by previous mural teams follow a different style.

"The staircases in the main building have some really big, incredible murals, and I find that they focus a lot more on an educational basis of showcasing famous writers or famous figures of history, and just really bringing a more educational and factual display of art," Basu said.

On the other hand, the current mural club focuses more on showcasing students' creativity.

"I was the designer for one of the murals we had painted on the second floor of the science building like the space one with the hands and biology plants and planets, and that one you could find more of a meaning or a symbol behind it because the hands are representing the painting of the creation of Adam," Kanaujia said.

Additionally, the designs of the murals remain fluid throughout the process, and they almost always turn out differently than they were first envisioned. Even so, the murals still have their intended impact on students and faculty.

"The point is just to create a change in our environment, to brighten people's moods, to create a positive thing for our community," Kanaujia said.

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A Look into Lexington High School's Robotic Teams

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Staff Writers

Lexington High School hosts a vigorous robotics program consisting of official teams such as 2 Bits and a Byte, the Parity Bits, the VEX robotics team, as well as clubs including LexRobotics and the Aerospace Robotics club.

LHS' robotics teams acquire new members through the clubs, 2 Bits and a Byte and Parity Bits. These clubs take turns recruiting members who have participated in the club for at least a year. Then they go on to compete in the FIRST Tech Challenge.

There are many differences between being on a team and being in a club.

"The team thinks through and fleshes out every idea. It's a much more thorough approach to robotics. When working individually, the only person you have to convince is yourself," Anjali Asthagiri, senior captain of the co-ed team 2 Bits and a Byte, said.

"In a club, you're just learning about the different fundamental parts you use to build robots. And then on a team, you're not just doing that, but you're competing where you build every school year, and you basically get a new challenge," Audi Lin, senior captain of the gender-minority team, the Parity Bits, said.

Although LHS has several robotics-related programs, some students participate on teams outside the school. An example is Soar, a team that competes in VEX Robotics competitions.

"We get a lot of freedom from being an independent team as opposed to school teams. They might have to have an advisor come with them, or they might have to be in the school with limited facilities," Marco Wang, a sophomore on Soar, said.

Asthagiri and McCandless described some important skills when building a robot. The team must recognize its objectives, constraints, and brainstorm ideas. Then, they should build rough prototypes of robotic hardware to test their ideas and choose what mechanisms they plan to use.

"Choose mechanisms that you'll use in your robot. Use your prototypes and consider how they operate together, not just individually," Joel McCandless, senior captain of the co-ed team 2 Bits and a Byte, said.

After, they enter a cycle of building, testing, and repeating.

"The key to a successful design process is doing a lot of testing and prototyping. We rarely make something perfect on the first try. It is important to iterate and improve on your designs as we test," Asthagiri said.

Although robotics is competitive, Lin believes preparing for competitions is not always about beating other teams.

"I guess when we're working on the robot, we don't really think about the competition, we just think about our goals for our robot," Lin said.

Similarly, for McCandless, the journey of preparing for robotics competitions is more rewarding than the end result.

"Each season, we start with nothing more than an idea to fulfill a challenge, and we end with a robot that outperforms our every expectation. Along the way, we constantly address and readdress problems, improving designs and mechanisms on a daily basis. This dedication to change makes me excited for the future and leaves me with a warm feeling inside, win or lose," McCandless said.

Hastings STEM Club Promotes STEM Education Among Youth

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Through innovative, experiment-based lessons, Lexington High School students in the Hastings science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) club have shared their love of science with fourth and fifth graders at Hastings Elementary School.

The LHS members plan, organize, and teach workshops to 45 Hastings students.

"Our mission is to give them opportunities to explore different STEM topics, and hopefully get more experience with different concepts and different experimental procedures so that they have exposure once they enter middle school or high school," Kathy Lim, a club leader and junior, said.

The Hastings STEM club has three six-week sessions: fall, winter, and spring. In between each session is a planning period of one and a half months.

"[Planning is] really beneficial, just so that our new volunteers really understand exactly what they need to be doing at Hastings… I think for the fall session, just because of our lack of LHS meetings, and also just the lack of volunteers, the leaders planned a lot of the experiments, but now the volunteers have the time and the space to make their own experiments," Lim said.

From coding to chromatography, these experiments cover a wide range of topics. One lesson was a murder mystery involving invisible ink and fingerprint identification. The students had to heat their paper with invisible ink to receive messages and match fingerprints with the fingerprints they received.

"It was super interactive for them, and even super fun for us to create and do. Seeing their finished products, where they sent back who they thought was the true murderer was just really fun," Emilie Xi, a club leader and senior, said.

Given its growing popularity, the Hastings STEM club is looking to expand. They recently obtained access to an additional room in Hastings that will allow them to take an additional 20 students. The club hopes to branch out to additional elementary schools due to interest from parents whose children attend other schools.

"We do have the goal of maybe starting sister clubs and maybe creating smaller branches of the same thing so we're able to go to each elementary school too," Xi said.

Hastings STEM Club teachers and students
Photo provided by Ireh Hong

Overall, this will allow members to connect with young students throughout Lexington's elementary schools. The experience allows volunteers to recognize the potential of the elementary schoolers and help them improve.

"It's incredibly rewarding to just be in the room and talk to a couple of kids and help them out because they're great kids. I think they're the ones who give the soul to the Hastings STEM club," Lim said.

The Lexington High School Engineering and Science Fair

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Jiyuan Xu
Staff Writers

The Lexington High School Engineering and Science Fair is an annual event that allows students to present their research projects to the Lexington community.

Held in February on the school campus, the fair attracts about 50 students yearly. After students sign up in September, they find a sponsor teacher to have their ideas approved. Then, they work on their projects until they present their work at the fair in February.

After participating in the LHS Science and Engineering Fair, students may be invited to participate in the Region IV fair, from which they may advance to the May Massachusetts Science and Engineering Fair (MSEF) or even the International Science and Engineering Fair (ISEF).

The fair is run every year in hopes of encouraging students to conduct original research.

"It provides kids - if they have an idea - an opportunity to run with that idea, and to take some original research, and explore it," Reginald Hobbs, the science department head and coordinator of the science fair, said.

The fair coordinators emphasize safety for the program. After students propose a testable idea, fair coordinators review potential safety concerns before a student can begin experimentation.

Once projects have been approved, students can begin conducting experiments and research. With school overlapping with the research period, there is a shortage of time to prepare their project for the school fair in February.

"This is a barrier that we see... [but] the kids that do the fair are passionate about it and experience success and failures, which is a nice part of the fair," Hobbs said.

The tight schedule for the LHS Science and Engineering Fair is designed to meet the dates of the regional fair and MSEF, which are held in March and May, respectively.

On the day of the science fair, participants are rewarded the opportunity to learn about other students' research and form connections with them.

"I think what is cool is when the kids are so excited to present their work to others. For me, when the kids are able to talk about something they are passionate about and interested in, it is a really great experience for them, and their pride of ownership of learning is the best part for me," Hobbs said.

The science fair is a stressful process, but participants often remember the scientific knowledge they gained and the topics they had the opportunity to explore.

"My favorite part about the LHS Science Fair is seeing all of the other amazing projects, and talking with other students about their work. The diversity of interesting topics and knowledgeability of my peers makes the fair a great place to hear about research across many fields in Science and Engineering. It is a great way to share your passion for science with others," Rohan Bandaru, the 2022 grand prize winner, said.

A Day in the Life of an Athletic Director

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Atreya Mallanna
Staff Writers

Naomi Martin, Lexington High School's athletic director, has been involved with athletics her whole life, from being a high school athlete, working in athletics at Lincoln-Sudbury and Ashland, and currently holding the position of athletic director at LHS.

However, Martin's current role as an athletic advisor comes with numerous responsibilities. Because of this, she values the variety that comes with each school day.

"On any given day, I could walk in here and be doing one of a thousand things," Martin said.

Martin has been the athletic director at LHS since 2009. She originally came to work at LHS because of its large student population; her old school at Ashland only had around 600 students.

"I knew Lexington was a different place. I knew it was a larger school with [more] diversity, which was very intriguing to me. I wanted to see what life in a bigger school meant, so that was the impetus for leaving a small school that was struggling with numbers and programming," Martin said.

Working in a bigger school brought new challenges for Martin, particularly scheduling. When creating LHS's sports schedule, Martin must consider a number of different factors. For instance, the limited number of referees has had major impact on LHS sports games' schedules.

"When I first started, officials were everywhere. Teachers and community members were officials. Now, many officials have retired and we haven't filled in subsequent generations with new officials. We struggle with that turnover and sometimes our game times and schedule are dictated by the availability of officials," Martin said.

Additionally, Martin highlights that the number of tasks she must complete creates a very complex situation to manage on a daily basis. However, she believes that the people she interacts with make her job so enjoyable.

"We rely on many different entities and stakeholders to make what we do work, but that's also what makes athletics so special. It's a large amount of people that come together," Martin said.

An example of this is LHS' recent Thanksgiving Day football game. Officials took time off their holidays to referee, and parents volunteered to run the concession stand. People came to work the scoreboard, announce the game, and even film the match. The entire community gathered together for this event.

"The number of people that give up time on Thanksgiving morning to be here at LHS to allow us to play a football game is amazing to me. When I step back and take a look at that, those are the moments where I feel the most proud of what I do, it takes people to give up themselves and contribute to a larger cause… That's the beauty of athletics," Martin said.

Athletic Director Naomi Martin sits in her office.
Photo by Vikram Anantha

Although the life of an athletic director is dynamic and filled with responsibilities, for Martin, being an athletic director is rewarding no matter the outcome.

"I don't have a 9-5 job. I work weekends and nights. I travel to other towns to watch games. I never know what's coming, it's problem solving and thinking on your feet, and at the heart of what I do is what's best for kids," Martin said.

Special Olympics Unified Basketball Tournament Nov. 15

Nora Kapoor
Samay Shah
Staff Writers

On Nov. 15, Lexington High School hosted the annual Special Olympics Unified Basketball tournament. Established in 2008, Unified Sports used the Special Olympics to promote inclusivity in sports. Every fall, six teams from the Middlesex League compete in the tournament.

Since the program began three years ago, Unified Basketball at LHS has consistently provided opportunities for students with special needs. Tom Brincklow, the team's coach, had been working in the LABBB program as a physical education teacher when he was asked to coach.

"I thought it'd be cool to give it a try. Honestly, it's probably the best thing I've ever done. It's very rewarding, coaching this team," Brincklow said.

The team consists of eight special education students, the athletes, and eight general education students, their partners. For basketball, the season consists of practices and games throughout the fall season.

Jake Conrad, a junior who has been a partner on the team since his freshman year, expressed his thoughts on the team's current progress.

"We had a fundraiser that we were doing which was really successful. We won one out of two games, everybody had a great time. We were also able to cheer on the other teams that were playing games, which was also really fun." Conrad said.

The Unified Basketball program is not only about competition, but also building friendships and fostering a sense of community among the players.

"I've learned how patient and great high school kids can be with [kids with special needs] playing on the same team," Brincklow said. "Our partners are awesome because it's not their job to shoot the ball, it's their job to help the game flow up and down the court and pass and dribble, and they set our athletes up to score. We've had awesome athletes and we get some of the nicest kids in the team and it's been that way for four years now."

Conrad reflected on his experience supporting the athletes and what this experience has taught him.

"Everyone is different and has different needs," Conrad said. "But if you're able to accommodate that, there are ways that everyone can succeed and have a good time. It's always important to push and work hard so that everybody feels included."

Lexettes Named Team USA

Aditya Chiduruppa
Toshio Yuki
Staff Writers

The Lexettes, a synchronized skating team, was recently named as members of Team USA and will compete in Salzburg, Austria, in mid-January against the best international junior skating teams.

In order for the Lexettes to compete internationally, they had to qualify through preliminary competitions within the United States, such as the California Fall Classic and the Boston Synchronized Skating Classic in November.

"Every season we have a series of qualifying competitions. There's a minimum score requirement that you have to meet at in order to be considered part of the international selection pool. If you meet that score requirement, you can be named Team USA. When we found out [our scores], we were really excited," Abby Lucas, a junior on the team, said.

During the 2021-2022 season, the Lexettes were were named Team USA and traveled to Poland. Despite winning fourth overall, they did not reach their goal of qualifying for the Junior Worlds.

"We just didn't really skate well. It was my first international competition [and] we just really want[ed] to do well, but things don't go as smoothly all the time, so definitely a learning experience," Ava Monaco, a senior on the team, said.

The team hoped to bounce back this season but endured many challenges because of the COVID-19 pandemic and its regulations.

"The biggest challenge for us was coping with balancing everything, staying healthy, and traveling during the pandemic. It was really hard to get the whole team home safe and healthy and we lost some training time," Lucas said.

Nonetheless, determination, hard work, and trust among the returning skaters allowed the team to persist through the season.

"This season, we have a bunch of returning skaters so I think we smoothed out the bumps a lot [from] last year. Obviously, nothing's perfect but I think with that kind of connection on and off the ice, we were able to pull it together a little bit sooner," Monaco said.

Even through tough times, the members of the team will always treasure moments of being able to travel around the world and compete together.

"After not competing for a year because of COVID, I'm just grateful that we have the opportunity. I realized how much I missed it. It's very exciting to be in that zone. Once you skate and have a good skate it's the best feeling knowing that was the best that you could do," Monaco said.

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